NOVA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

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EXPLORING STRATEGIC SCENARIOS TO DEVELOP THE WEDDING ACCESSORIES BRAND CATA VASSALO

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Cata Vassalo is a wedding accessories brand that sells hand-made jewelry for both brides and wedding guests. This project aims to explore strategic scenarios to develop the brand Cata Vassalo, without losing its' main characteristics, and after understanding the wedding accessories market dynamics. Accordingly, three scenarios were drawn taking into consideration the distinctive consumer journeys in this market. The first will explore consumers of the Involvement and Simplicity Journey, the second consumers of the Involvement and Exclusivity Journey and the third consumers of the Involvement and Simplicity Journey abroad. We recommend the brand to develop the third scenario, as it is the one with higher growth expectations.

Wedding Accessories Market

Consumer Decision Journey

Brand Positioning

Social Media Platforms

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cata Vassalo, CV, is a four years old wedding accessories brand that was able to build a solid position in the market thanks to the distinct quality of the products and a strong presence in social media platforms, which led to significant brand awareness results. The "wedding market" seemed an interesting topic for research as it is growing in Portugal, and in what concerns accessories, it was interesting to study what was expected to be a low involvement category and find characteristics of high involvement. CV seemed the most interesting brand in its' market as it was successfully able to position its' accessories for a wedding occasion, while the main competitors could not give up the security and comfort a general positioning and communication might bring. We did not have the opportunity to formally meet the brand creator, nevertheless, we accepted the challenge and developed several scenarios for this brand to grow.

2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

1. The Brand

The Cata Vassalo brand was created in 2015 by its founder and creative director until the present day: Catarina Vassalo. Accordingly, telling the story of the founder fits the purpose of explaining the story of the brand. Catarina Vassalo was born in Lisbon. In 1998 Catarina finished her studies in Metal Restauration. She moved to England with her husband where she started to sell accessories made by her own hands door-to-door and at events, ending up selling in several stores. Catarina decided to move to Valencia, Spain, where she was impressed and inspired by the disruptive way Spanish ladies would use their accessories. She opened "Biju e Etc" where jewelry and headdresses were sold, being the first sale at Kate Middleton and Prince William's wedding day on Abril 29th, 2011. Catarina returned to

Portugal. With knowledge from different markets, and an increased passion for accessories, Catarina launches Cata Vassalo brand online in 2015, and in 2017 opens the *Atelier* in Alcabideche, where a growing portfolio of products are sold (Chaves, 2019). Please check appendix 1 for the logo picture.

i. Products

Cata Vassalos' main offer are headdresses for brides. The brand offers special editions and a semi-annual catalogue, personalized to each brides' taste in what concerns size and colors. Prices vary from 60€ to 480€. For guests, Cata Vassalo offers headdresses as well, in the form of formal hats (with prices from 112€ to 250€), clutches (all 60€) and headbands, that can be used in the day-to-day life (with prices varying from 98€ to 125€). CV also offers headdresses for kids (that vary from 38€ to 75€) and hairpins (36€ to 42€). The range of products further includes earrings, with prices from 26€ to 99€. All the products are hand made by Catarina, the founder and creative director. Please check Appendix 2 for pictures.

ii. Target

Cata Vassalo's communication efforts should be designed to appeal to brides and wedding guests from a medium to high social group in Portugal looking for the extra detail to wear when getting married or attending a wedding.

iii. Distribution Channels

Cata Vassalo currently uses an Omni Channel strategy: the brand sells both online and offline, and the experiences are integrated. Brides can schedule an appointment and go to the *Atelier,* in Alcabideche, near to Lisbon; or purchase online in the brand website. In both processes, and considering that each bride is different, CV offers the chance to presentially try the piece and adapt it to each brides' taste, or to receive pictures of the editions online.

iv. Communication Channels

Cata Vassalo decided to exclusively focus its communication on social media platforms, namely Instagram and Facebook, where professional photos with models and client's experiences with the products are shared, and where a space for conversation is proposed. Instagram is where the brand decided to invest. CVs' account has 33 200 followers, including other wedding related brands and several celebrities. These celebrities, chosen according to the connection with the brands' values, have been key for the growth of Cata Vassalo in this social media platform, as well as the tagging function: every time someone (can be a consumer or another brand) posts a picture of a bride that is using Cata Vassalo, the viewer of the post can be directed to the brands' page. That led people that followed these different accounts (from dress brands accounts to photographer's accounts), to visit Cata Vassalo's Instagram and possibly the website for the first time. Please check Appendix 3.

2. Concepts used to address the thesis topic

Considering that the objective of this work project is to develop the brand Cata Vassalo, it seems important to explore both the consumer decision journey of a bride when deciding her dress and accessories and the brand image and positioning concepts. The Consumer Decision Journey is a relevant tool to conceptualize the buyers' process until purchase, how people arrived to the brand, explore how they behave, in order to adapt, improve or overcome key factors that influence decisions (McKinsey Quarterly, 2009). Brand image, the perception consumers have about a brand, is considered relevant, as consumers are not just buying a product or service; they are buying what a brand stands for, and hence it is fitting to communicate in order to achieve a brand image that matches both the personality of the brand and the personality of the consumer (Thimothy, 2016). Finally, brand positioning, as it is the driving force behind all actions, hence influencing crucial strategic factors such as how to differentiate from competitors, defining the target market, developing service and pricing, effective and creative decision making and tools to win clients (Frederiksen, 2017). We define below the model of consumer decision journey and the brand image and positioning concepts.

i. Consumer Decision Journey

The emergence of social media and the consequent consumer rising power in terms of decision making changed the moments where brand can influence consumers. The Consumer Decision Journey model (CDJ) seems the best approach to, in this reality, understand what these new moments are and develop the best strategy (Edelman, 2010). Here is the model designed by Mckinsey & Company.

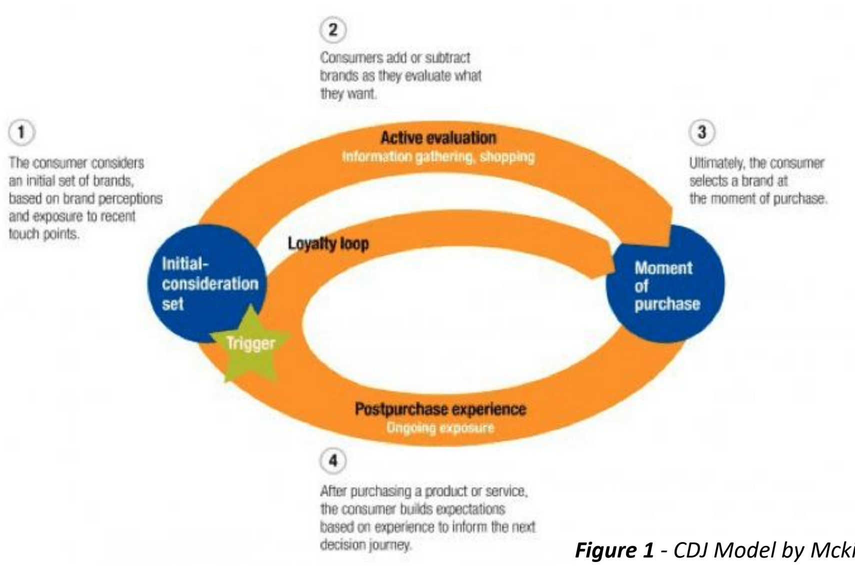


Figure 1 *- CDJ Model by Mckinsey Quarterly 2009*

As visible in Figure 1, the CDJ is composed of four stages. The first is the **Initial Consideration** stage, where thanks to the exposure to recent touch points and consequent brand perceptions, the consumer stablishes an initial consideration of a set of brands to purchase (McKinsey Quarterly, 2017). The second stage is **Active Evaluation,** where consumers add and subtract brands from the group formed in the initial consideration stage. Consumers are gaining more control over the process: two thirds of the touch points during the active-evaluation phase involve consumer driven marketing activities, such as internet reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations from known peers, as well as in-store interactions and past experiences takeaways (McKinsey Quarterly, 2017). The third stage is **the Moment of purchase**, were consumers can be influenced by product packaging, placement and by salespeople (McKinsey Quarterly, 2009). The fourth stage is the **Post purchase experience,** where consumers experience using the product, and according to that experience, decide how the next journey will be like next time that need arises. There are two possible scenarios: either the consumer can be triggered to go to the first stage, experiencing the cycle once again from the beginning, or on the other hand, the consumer can become loyal to the brand. In that case, the consumer remains in the loyalty loop, meaning that for a finite period of time he or she will only go through the third and fourth stage of the cycle in future purchase scenarios. According to their behavior, consumers can be described as active loyals, who stick with the brand and recommend it to others; or passive loyals, who do not recommend to peers and are more easily open to messages from competitors that give them a reason to switch (McKinsey Quarterly, 2009). It is hence critical that, after developing a deep knowledge of how consumers make decisions, there is a focus of strategies and investments on those most influential points, in order to increase return on investment (Edelman, 2010).

ii. Brand Awareness and Image

Brand awareness "measures the number of people who know what the brand stands for and are aware of what promises this sign has given, namely in terms of know-how (which products, which services)" (Kapferer, 2004, p158). The brand image is defined by "Consumers' perceptions about a brand, as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller et al., 2013, p72). Those associations may arise from the brand's marketing activities, from direct experience and also from shared information platforms (consumer reports, communities' opinions). Associations may include some attributes of the brand, a person, symbol, country or ideal.

iii. Brand Positioning

Brand positioning is the "act of designing the company's offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the target customer's mind" (Keller et al., 2013, p79). Keller defines brand positioning according to the following concepts: 1) the target consumer, 2) competitors, 3) points of parity and 4) points of difference (Keller et al, 2013). The **target** is inferred from a market that is segmented, in order to be able to "find distinct groups of consumers who have similar needs and consumer behavior and thus require similar marketing mixes" (Keller et al., 2013, p 82). There are several methods to segment a market, namely demographic segmentation (e.g. age, sex); behavioral segmentation, (e.g. usage behavior, occasion purchasing), and brand loyalty, (e.g. degree of commitment of consumers and their willingness to switch). In spite of the method, there are 4 criteria that have to be met: identifiability (easily determined), size (adequate sales potential), accessibility (possibility to actually reach the segment) and responsiveness (ability for the segment to respond to marketing campaigns). (Keller et al., 2013). **Competition** is composed by all brands that serve the target in the product type level, the product category level, the product class level and at the benefit level. (Keller et al, 2013). **Points of Difference** (POD) are "attributes or benefits that consumers strongly associate with a brand, positively evaluate and believe that they could not find to the same extent with a competitive brand" (Keller et al., 2013, p83). They can be functional (performance-related) considerations or abstract (imagery-related) considerations. They also must address to three main criteria: relevance, distinctiveness and believability (Keller et al., 2013). **Points of Parity** (POP) are the associations that may be shared with other brands. There are category points of parity, "associations that consumers see as being necessary to legitimize and turn credible the offerings within a certain product or service category, meaning they represent necessary but not sufficient conditions for brand choice" (Keller et al, 2013, pg. 84); and competitive points of parity, that "are those associations designed to negate competitors points of difference" (Keller et al, 2013, pg. 84).

3. ADDRESSING THE WORK PROJECT TOPIC

1. Methodology

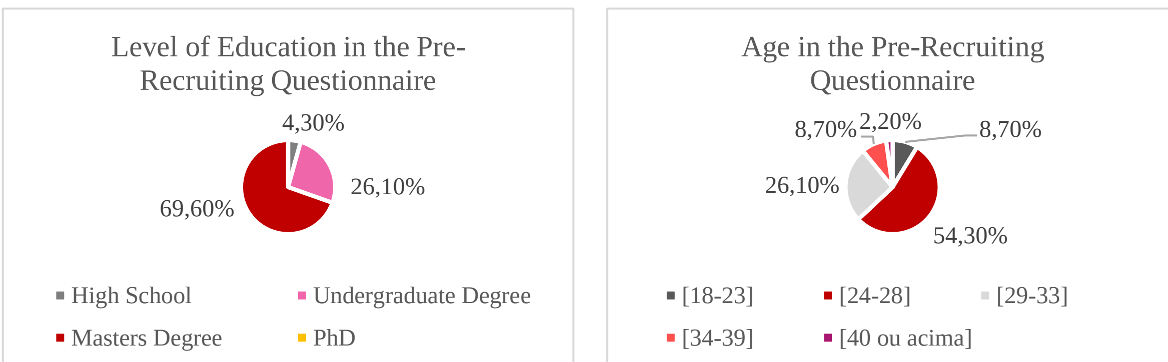
i. Research Approach

In order to study the Consumer Decision Journey and the current brand image and positioning of CV, we decided to focus our data collection on brides versus wedding guests, guaranteeing more focused responses and hence more detailed insights, as the brand focus also goes to brides. The information was obtained through qualitative research, in the form of **i)** in-depth semi structured interviews, where interviewees were selected based on a Pre-recruiting questionnaire. Qualitative research was considered the best option because there was a need to understand behaviors, personal opinions and patterns (Berkwits, 1998). We also collected data through **ii)** social media listening research, in order to infer brand awareness and brand image and **iii)** two visits to the *Atelier* including meetings with the sales assistant.

i) **Pre-Recruiting Questionnaire and Qualitative in-depth Interviews:**

The Pre-Recruiting Questionnaire was conducted online (see Appendix 4) and sent to portuguese brides that got engaged from 2015 to 2019, given that the brand was first available to be purchased in 2015. From the 46 respondents, 54,3% where 24-28 years old and 26,1% between 29 to 33 years old, which matches the national average age of brides of 31 years in the last 4 years, according to Pordata, 2018. For more detailed info please see Appendix 5. In terms of level of education, 69,2% completed a master degree and 26,1% an undergraduate degree. The majority of respondents had a religious wedding, which does not entirely represent the portuguese population (Goulão, 2018).

Figure 2: Level of Education and Age of Pre-Recruiting Questionnaire Respondents



Source: Own Research, Pre-Recruiting Questionnaires

A **Qualitative in-depth interview** was made to 21 portuguese brides who got married from 2015 to 2019 that were selected from the Pre-Recruiting Questionnaire according to their level of education and their willingness to participate to a qualitative interview. The level of education was a criteria as it constitutes a good proxy to the social status variable (Marktest, 1998), where the higher the level of education, the higher the probability that the interviewee belongs to a middle/high social class, the class where the great majority of Cata Vassalos' consumers belong to. Therefore, every respondent with an undergraduate degree or higher level was contacted. During the interview, in order to get to feelings and cognitions that are below rational or conscious awareness, an association projective technique was used (Nunez, 2015). It tries to eliminate the normal rational connections and go deeper into the emotional state of the interviewee, taking respondents out of their comfort zone, in order to generate a more clear, deep and honest answer (Parry, 2018). For the purpose of this work project, the question used was “If you had to describe yourself, what you were feeling, emotionally, spiritually, about your look; all emotions together, on your wedding day, and relate it to an animal, what would it be?”. Please check the interview guide in Appendix 6.

i) **Social Media Listening Research:** In order to get insights on brand awareness and brand image, a social media listening research was conducted on Instagram, the main social media platform of the brand. From June 2019 to December 2019, important mentions and posts, likes and comments were studied in order to formulate hypotheses.

2. Research Insights

After collecting the necessary information some insights were drawn. 20 out of 21 brides used headdresses, and 21 used earrings, which suggests that these two types of accessories are relevant for a bride. When engaged, the majority of brides do not want to “loose much time” with accessories while so busy with preparation work. Accordingly, brides searched wedding related content (dresses, accessories, wedding venues and wedding themes) mostly online; prior, during and after the engagement period. Almost all respondents did know Cata Vassalo (17/21) thanks to social media, mostly Instagram (15/17) and Facebook (2/17); which reveals the importance of social media for brand awareness. The ones that did not know the brand were not from Lisbon (2/4) or got engaged in 2015 (2/4). From the 17 interviewees who knew the brand, 3 **bought** *headdresses* from CV and already knew from the beginning (2/3 before they got engaged) that they wanted to use CV on their wedding. The 17 respondents mentioned that they used a simple dress and therefore, the headdress would be essential to give personalization to the look. Those who knew and did not buy CV referred three main reasons **not to** purchase headdresses from the brand: **1)** They inherited accessories from their family (5/14), **2)** the brand was too expensive (3/14), and **3)** the brand is too extravagant for their taste (3/14).

In what concerns *earrings*, no interviewee chose CV, even though some bought as a guest for other ceremonies. The main assumptions of why they did not buy are, from the most to the least mentioned, because the brides inherited or were offered earrings, because they bought them from an alternative brand that they knew from the beginning (by order of relevance there are jewelry shops, *Carolina Curado*, *Juliana Bezerra* and *Swarovski*), or because CV's earrings were too expensive.

In what concerns heritage, for both types of accessories, it is relevant to mention that every time a bride had some family jewelry borrowed, they would use it thanks to its' emotional meaning and even brides that did not inherit said that if they could, they would have loved to use those pieces.

i. Consumer Decision Journeys

When evaluating the consumers' journey, the data suggested that there is a pre-stablished way to get married in Portugal within the studied social group, namely, there is a fixed combination of brands considered for the more significant aspects of a wedding: the dress, accessories, catering and wedding venue. To be precise, this "established set" includes mainly *Pureza de Mello Breyner*, *Stoa and Iza Van*, three brands in which dresses are handmade; Cata Vassalo and *Carolina Curado*, both portuguese designers who sell handmade jewelry; *Amor e Lima* for catering and finally *Solar de Pancas or Casa do Marquês* as the venue, if families do not own a property (or *quinta* in portuguese). To get in this pre-arranged set as a bride does not mean purchasing these exact brands, but that the bride would be satisfied with a similar concept. Our assumption is that this set of brands "emerged" around 2017, as brides prior to that year believe that there was not so much organized offer, and that what they found were "smaller" brands with low expression, that were suggested by a third party. With the rise of social media, the above-mentioned brands seem to be the ones that stood out from the crowd and presented brides with a solution.

Taking these insights into consideration, there are three types of journeys a bride can take: the **1st Journey** if she is aware of the pre-established socially recognized set of brands and goes along with it, the **2nd Journey** if she is aware and chooses to go apart from it as much as possible, and the **3rd Journey** if wedding accessories are not a high involvement product category for her.

1st - The Involvement and Beauty Journey

This is one of the most frequent journeys in our sample (11/21 interviewees). Women from this journey rely deeply on social media and end up influencing their taste according to what is more commonly shown to them. Searches for wedding content are not only made by brides as one could expect, but single and already married women as well, which reveals that these consumers have a high emotional involvement with the category. Additionally, it is relevant to add that women from the three journeys value the same aspects: beauty and physical appearance, uniqueness and simplicity; nevertheless, they seem to give different levels of importance to each. Accordingly, women from the 1st journey equally value simplicity, beauty and physical appearance, followed by uniqueness. Brides from this journey do not want to call all the attention to them, nevertheless, as they recognize that the bride is the main character of the wedding, they want to look beautiful, with a "less is more" kind of look.

Initial Consideration Set: The Common Opinion - *I know and I am already familiar to the set of brands proposed for my wedding. I got to them through social media, thanks to famous people, influencers and suggestions from the platforms. Friends of mine, married single or engaged, also follow their social media platforms, we discuss it together.* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

"I followed her social media for a long time. It was a hit on Instagram, even before I got engaged. I knew from the beginning I wanted a Cata Vassalo headdress" (27, Used Cata Vassalo for her wedding)
"There was Black Friday, and I already followed another brand, I think it is called *Carolina Curado*, and it had a promotion on the model I had laid eyes on" (27, Used Carolina Curado for her wedding)

Active Evaluation: The Common Opinion - *I check similar brands to the wedding accessories brands previously selected and compare. The main factors for me to decide among them are Price, Quality and Simplicity. As I have a quite defined idea of what I want, there is not much external influence. If I need help, it is just a second opinion, the decision will be almost entirely mine.* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

"It Was 100% my decision" (24, Used Cata Vassalo for her wedding)
"I already knew her and owned some of her earrings. I saw Cata but still Carolina has a great thing: her pieces are beautiful and not too expensive." (27, Used *Carolina Curado* for her wedding)

Moment of Purchase: It is pretty much decided already, hence there is no significant store or store assistant influence.

"It Was 90% me and 10% my mother, the store assistant advised but did not really influenced me)" (24, Used Cata Vassalo for her wedding)

Loyalty Loop: The Common Opinion - *I got the chance to experience what I was previously dreaming, and I want to give that feeling and opportunity to others, so I will recommend these brands to my friends and family. There is no repurchase of headdresses,* *possibly only earrings. I continue to follow the brands' social platforms*. (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

2nd - The Involvement and Exclusivity Journey

This is the rarest journey in our sample (1/21). It also derives from a deep dive in social media that shapes personal tastes and likes. In this case, the urge to feel unique overpowers simplicity. Beauty is key as brides want to be at their best and do not mind being the center of attention. They want people to look at them, be amazed, and never see anything similar in the next few years. That feeling gives them confidence.

Initial Consideration Set: The Common Opinion - *The pre-fixed set for wedding brands is already known so I reject it. I got to them through social media, thanks to famous people, influencers and suggestions from the platforms. I saw it too much. I hence followed some less recognized brands that match my personality and tastes.* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

> "I feel that Cata Vassalo has beautiful pieces, but it is so seen already" (25, Used Juliana Bezerra for her wedding)
> " I arrived at *MadBridal* through Instagram, before I was even engaged. I followed also Pureza long ago. I followed Juliana as well and I had already seen a picture online and loved it. I said when I get married, I want to use this earrings" (25, Used Juliana Bezerra for her wedding)

Active Evaluation*:* The Common Opinion - *What drives my choice is escaping the pattern. Uniqueness and Quality are the factors that help me choose among brands. I might occasionally confirm my evaluation with a very close person who knows me well* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

> "It was 70% me 30% my mother in the final decision" (25, Used MadBridal for her wedding)

Moment of Purchase*:* The Common Opinion - *It is pretty much decided already, hence there is no significant store or store assistant influence in my decision.* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

"The girl from the store advised me but had no impact on my final decision." (25, Used MadBridal for her wedding)

Loyalty Loop: There is no repurchase of headdresses, possibly only earrings. Active recommendation is a reality but only to a closer circle, as uniqueness is key.

3rd - The Non-Involvement Journey

This is the second most common case in our sample (9/21). Women do not really pay attention to accessories, not before nor after getting engaged. It is not a priority, and they give the final months or even weeks to take care of that as quickly and effectively as possible. They can be influenced by social media as well, not really in the choice of accessories, as it is a low involvement category for them, but for the dress and wedding venues. Further from Facebook and Instagram, brides also go for Pinterest, to get a general perception of a style they would like without advocating immediately to any specific brand. Women from this journey seem, above any other characteristics, to be really devoted to family, refer that their way of living is simple, and what really matters in their wedding day is the vow and commitment they are assuming. In this journey, even though brides always want to look beautiful, simplicity concerns seem to overpower uniqueness and physical appearance concerns.

Initial Consideration Set: The Common Opinion - *As I do not really pay attention to accessories, I did not research much about it. If anything, what is on my mind is a jewelry shop where I went previously or that I know* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

“For me this was quite indifferent so I believed my mother would do a good job choosing for me” (23, Used Cata Vassalo for her wedding)
I was looking for bride stuff, and as I was walking down the street, I found a bridal shop and I got in” (25, Used Jewelry Shop accessories for her wedding)

Active Evaluation: The Common Opinion -*I check rapidly the first brands that I can find and like through social media. As I do not have a defined idea, external influence is key. My mother is the biggest influencer, followed by friends and lastly hairdressers. The main factors to decide are easy access, fast service, price, and beauty* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

“Everything is super expensive and so I am thinking about doing something myself, but I am still just thinking.” (27, Did not purchase anything yet)
“The problem is that Cata was too far. I bought everything at lunch times” (48, Used Rosa Clará for her wedding)

Moment of Purchase: The Common Opinion - *I can change my opinion not only in what concerns brands but between products as well if switching costs are low. Store assistants influence my opinion. As I am quite “vulnerable” to external influence, getting too much feedback can turn to a negative experience, as I just get more indecisive and tempted to please whoever is there to help* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

“It was quite easy to find what I was looking for since I wanted something really simple and They had a lot of txana stuff, so we were there for 30min and we chose what my mother already had chosen” (23, Used Cata Vassalo for her wedding)
“I bought ones in *Leitão Irmãos*, but then I did not love it, so I bought a second pair, that were brighter, in another store in front” (23, Used Jewelry Shop accessories for her wedding)

Loyalty Loop: The Common Opinion - *There is no repurchase of headdresses, possibly only earrings. There is no active recommendation. I will stop looking for bridal accessories. Most chances are I will not even remember the name of the brand I chose for my accessories. “I can give you the location, if you need help!”* (Filipa Drummond Borges, based on extracts from the interviews).

ii. Brand Awareness and Brand Image

In what concerns brand awareness, the analysis suggested that the brand might have hit the maximum viewership expected given its' size. According to the social media listening research, both regular and famous people keep sharing pictures with products. Even if one does not follow Cata Vassalo on Instagram, but follows wedding photographer accounts, wedding dress brands accounts or wedding venues accounts, the name Cata Vassalo will keep showing up. The brand keeps posting, from new releases, to brides' real pictures from their weddings, to influencers wearing products, to posts informing that the brand will be present in a market, to consumers reviews. To summarize, it is arguable that the brand achieved a high level of awareness and engagement for its size. In what concerns brand image, our research suggests that Cata is "the brand" for accessories, not only for weddings, but for all ceremonies. In posts related to Catas' products there is always a tone of happiness, a mention of gratitude or an amazed perspective towards the beauty and quality of the products. Please check Appendix 3.

According to the information obtained from interviewees and from the social media listening research, we listed the current associations.

Table 1: Main Cata Vassalo Brand Associations

Positive:		Negative:
-Headdresses and Earrings -Beauty -Heritage / Family Pieces -Princess / Queen	-Gold / Silver -Flowers -Vintage	- Extravagant - Expensive - Too Much for me - Too big Earrings

Source: Own Research, based on the qualitative interviews.

ii) Current Brand Positioning

As previously stated, brand positioning involves the target, competitors, points of difference and points of parity. The current **target** of Cata Vassalo are brides and wedding guests from a medium to high social group in Portugal looking for an extra detail to wear when getting married or attending a wedding. The main **competitors** are other accessories brands, namely *Carolina Curado* and *Juliana Bezerra* for mostly the first and second journey's types of consumers. There are also the wedding dress brands that include accessories in their portfolio but are not really devoted to them, like *Rosa Clará* and *Pronovias,* and all jewelry shops, that compete with Cata Vassalo mostly for the third journey type of consumers. The **point of difference** is the unique range of beautiful products made by hand by the designer herself and the **point of parity** is the wish to make all women feel beautiful and special. Accordingly , the **current positioning statement** can be formulated as follows: "For all women looking for an extra detail to wear when getting married or attending a wedding, Cata Vassalo is a wedding accessories brand that offers beautiful and unique products made directly from the designers' hands, allowing every women to feel as beautiful and special as in their own dreams".

4. DISCUSSION: SCENARIOS TO DEVELOP THE BRAND

After drawing hypotheses of what are the current consumer journeys and the brand image and positioning of Cata Vassalo, three scenarios were formulated in order to develop the wedding accessories brand, explained using the CDJ model and showing the strengths and threats of implementing each strategy. A scenario including 3rd Journey consumers was not made as our belief is that the brand should not focus on them. If these brides end up purchasing Cata Vassalos' products it is quite random as they do not value the category.

a) Scenario 1 – Explore Involvement and Beauty Journey Consumers

The first scenario, as the title suggests, will have as its scope the development of strategies to further obtain and engage the 1st journey consumers. In order to develop the brand for consumers in the *initial consideration stage*, a high social media presence is essential. CV should keep posting the same type of content, take advantage of influencers, famous people, models and regular brides using their products, leverage on the tagging function and on other platforms from different brands (photographers, dress brands, wedding venues' accounts). Models and famous people are relevant not only because they have a lot of followers, which is expected to increase viewership and awareness, but because they help to build a "dream aura" around CV's products. With the aim of further building a position for CV in consumers' minds, the brand could be present in more markets and fairs related either to jewelry or to weddings, and to further invest in Instagram and Facebooks' advertising functions. With that help, consumers that fit the brands' target can be reached and a specific target message sent to them, according to the journey and the stage they are in. As the *Evaluation stage* is concerned, and as consumers value price, quality and simplicity as criteria to choose among brands, Cata Vassalo could simultaneously explore consumers looking for more quality by having a line of products that have more details and hand craft art at a higher price point; and consumers who prefer a "less is more" style, by having another line with simpler designs at a lower price point. The first offer should be presented with models and famous people as a priority comparatively to regular brides, as it will increase the "dream aura" around products for all consumers; while the second should have regular brides as a priority compared with models and famous people, as reality and simplicity are better conveyed. Consumers will be consequently triggered to dream of using Cata Vassalo products for their weddings, some of them will opt for the more sophisticated and hence expensive products, while others will opt for the simpler ones at a comparatively lower price point. Price ranges for the first mentioned line of headdresses could be from 60€ to 200€ and for the second from 200€ to 500€, and for earrings 30€ to 50€ and 50€ to 80€ respectively. In what concerns the *Moment of Purchase,* and as ideas are already quite fixed in consumers' minds, sales assistants should be careful when advising customers, saying "What do you think of this option?" and "I think this option meets your criteria" rather than "This would look better on you" or "this is what is selling more right now". Always complement the bride and provide the best service possible. In what concerns *Loyalty,* Cata Vassalo should help consumers to keep connected to the brand by keeping posting pictures of real brides on their pages with their permission and sharing their positive reviews. Furthermore, Cata Vassalo could send a letter to the bride congratulating her for her wedding day and for the trust she deployed on the brand with a picture of her using the accessory she bought, and another one on the 1st year anniversary. Brides will be surprised and content with the gesture, and that will incentivize them not only to keep in touch with the brand, possibly buying another product, but also to advise it to peers.

The **Strength** of this strategy is its' easiness to implement. All steps mentioned are just the consequence of a continued process that has been conducted for some amount of time, and hence the brand is able to leverage on its' experience and on the positive brand equity. The **Threat** is that it is arguable that in what concerns media presence, Cata Vassalo is about to, or already has, achieved the maximum viewership and fame for a wedding accessories brand on these platforms. Therefore, this scenario is not expected to trigger a high impact on sales.

b) Scenario 2 - Explore Involvement and Exclusivity Journey Consumers

The second scenario has as its scope the development of strategies to attract 2nd journey consumers, consumers that were before out of reach. Note that consumers that already entered the journey will not be impacted by the suggestions in this scenario, as they already think that Cata is a "too much seen" brand. In what concerns recommendations, firstly it is recommended that another section of products is created, products that have noticeable quality and beauty, but most of all, that are restricted. Products should be restricted in production quantities, each design should be afterwards adapted according to each bride tastes and personality (which makes it even more unique) and according to the complexity of the piece, the price could be set at a higher point. A new name, in order to mark the difference between the two, is suggested, for example, "*Cata Vassalo, Exclusive Collection*" (See Appendix 7 for a logo example). Having this said, in what concerns *the initial consideration set* touch point, Cata Vassalo should keep using social media as the major communication channel, as these brides also research a lot online, but with an additional social media account with a different transmitted message: that this line is special and hence restricted to the lucky few. This new account, that is a restricted section of the Cata Vassalo main account, should pay special attention in what concerns tagging, following, commenting and liking. We need people to see this new account, to know this new line of products, nevertheless, we need to keep restricted and therefore, the brand should only appear and be mentioned in relevant accounts, and eliminate any other mention that will just produce noise and too much repetition to these new consumers. In what concerns the *Evaluation* stage, and as exclusivity is the main criteria to decide between brands, social media posts should contain more famous people and influencers, as it helps to build the "dream aura" , instead of regular brides, who will probably trigger a feeling of "it is used and seen already". Videos of products being handmade can also be added, as they are able to reveal the quality, beauty and uniqueness of each piece. In what concerns the *Moment of Purchase,* the brand could create a different section of the store for the "*Exclusive Collection"* clients. It is not prejudicial to be in the same *Atelier* as Cata Vassalo, because it can help consumers to believe they belong to a different and more exquisite group. In what concerns consumer service, suggestions are the same as for the 1st Journey consumers. In what concerns *loyalty*, the brand could send letters as was suggested for regular Cata Vassalo consumers and a special surprise could be given to *exclusive collection* consumers on their first year of engagement, namely small simple earrings with the same color/flower/stone as their wedding headdress/earrings.

The **Strength** of this 2nd Scenario is that it attracts a segment of consumers that were out of reach, consumers who are willing to pay at a higher price point. The **Threats** are the effort, the high investment, the creativity struggle to bring a brand new section of products, the fact that this group of consumers constitute a minority in the weddings market, which increases the risk of this investment and of losing consumers from the 1st Journey, as focus is dispersed.

c) Scenario 3– Explore Involvement and Beauty Journey Consumers Abroad

Given that Cata Vassalo is in a great position in the portuguese wedding accessories market, the possibility to expand abroad should be considered. In order to build the smoothest process possible, the brand should focus on a country where there are consumers with a similar behavior to the described 1st Journey consumers. One of the best hypotheses to consider might be Spain, firstly, because Catarina Vassalo, the founder, already experienced working there with a previous brand, and hence, has the basic knowledge of competition, contacts, networks, of the market as it is. Secondly, Spain is close, and it is easier to expand to a close country, not only geographically, but also culturally where ceremonies are concerned. Thirdly, portuguese brides already mention that their decisions have a lot of Spanish wedding culture influence, and thus, it seems that a proximity between behaviors and tastes is met, and to expand there as a brand might even increase the brand image here in Portugal.

Fourthly, Spain seems to be the country where brides invest more in their wedding, that has a lot of known wedding related brands and going there might also increase brand equity. It is expected that the brand would face a higher level of competition, nonetheless, there is also a bigger market to share among players. Furthermore, Spanish ladies in general seem more concerned about their image and beauty, more "*vaidosas*" in portuguese, and accordingly, when showing the portfolio of CV, we got feedback like "*I really like the accessories! they are very nice! I think that kind of products are very demanding nowadays. But I would use that kind of accessories not only for weddings but also parties or formal events as well" (27, Not yet engaged).* That means that accessories like Cata Vassalos' in Spain are of interest for simpler occasions than a wedding, which opens doors for more markets for the brand to grow. Having this said, the brand should start selling online and when possible open an *Atelier in a* central city in Spain, so orders in Spain do not overload the small portuguese *Atelier* in Alcabideche. In order for the brand to enter the *Initial Consideration Set* of these new Spanish consumers, the website needs then to contemplate the Spanish language. There should be an investment in social media through a Spanish account, where Spanish celebrities and influencers are contacted, like *María Pombo, Maria Frubies Casilda Finat* and *Maria de Jaime*. Models should also be Spanish ladies and photos could be taken in known Spanish places that fit the brand image that Cata wants to convey, in order to enable a connection with the new buyers. Further from this, the process would be quite similar to the one pursued in the first scenario. In what concerns *Evaluation,* and as the main criteria to decide among options are price, quality and simplicity, and as Spanish brides are expected to be a bit more bold, two lines could be drawn, one more detailed and more special, at a higher price point, and other that has its' beauty in its' simplicity. Communication should be mainly focused on the more detailed line of products, as that is what catches the attention of brides that do not know the brand yet. In what concerns the *Moment of Purchase,* the decision on the product is almost taken, but it is crucial to leave a great impression, as the brand is new, in order to incentivize referral, that would gradually bring new customers and increase brand awareness. The store should meet Cata Vassalos' intended brand image while connecting with the Spanish culture. It could also display the *Atelier* on the back, through a glass or a window, to show how thorough the work to build each product is. Finally, in order to help build *loyalty*, the brand should make sharing of content easy. In all social media and in the website the option to share or sent as a private message to peers should be available. Furthermore, pictures of happy brides using their products could be shared, as well as their positive reviews. As in the first scenario, Cata Vassalo could send these new Spanish consumers a letter congratulating the bride for their wedding day and for their first anniversary.

As **Strengths** for this scenario one should mention the potential growth of the brand, the higher brand image and equity, the higher volume of sales and the advantage over portuguese competitors. The **Threats** are the high investment, the high level of competition in Spain, and a significant loss of potential 2nd Journey consumers, as the brand would only get more famous and visible then what it currently is, which reduces brand value for them. Given all the strengths and threats of the three given suggestions, our main recommendation is that Cata Vassalo chooses the third scenario for the brand to grow. It is the one that represents a higher potential return on investment, the one that will bring growth to the brand nationally and internationally, even though it is the one that needs more effort to pursue. Accordingly, please check a suggestion for the following steps to start deploying the third strategy within the scope of this thesis in appendix 8.

5. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The Mckinsey & Company CDJ model was fundamental to analyze and define the brands' consumers and consequently structure and present our recommendations. When adapting the interviews results to the CDJ model, and while drawing the three different decision journeys, some adjustments were needed for the wedding accessories market. In this market, before there is a trigger (the engagement proposal), women already search for accessories for their wedding, and possibly already have a fixed idea of what they want to purchase. In this market, the moment of purchase is not significant in what concerns influencing consumers, as decisions occur mostly prior to this moment. Furthermore, loyalty is not visible through repurchase, but mainly through recommendations, likes and shares in social media after the bride gets married. This by its turn deeply influences other brides in the evaluation stage. To sum up, it is arguable that a CDJ model that fits this market to a higher depth degree would have first the initial consideration group, than the trigger, then the evaluation stage (where social media posts and likes are crucial, and fomented by loyal consumers and influencers), the moment of purchase with fewer influence, and the loyalty loop with no repurchase experience, where loyal brides recommend to peers, verbally and through a continuous presence in the brands social media, and accordingly, the loop would not be from purchase experience to moment of purchase, but rather to evaluation.

6. WORK PROJECT LIMITATIONS

The main constraints when writing this thesis were time (as this is a four months thesis) and the lack of an opportunity to meet the brand founder and creative director. In what concerns qualitative in-depth interviews, we were able to interview 21 brides, which is not be a big enough sample to draw *secure* conclusions for the complete bride population. Moreover, and as the scope of this thesis was related to marketing and strategy, all the suggestions will further need to be evaluated with a financial analysis.

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8. APPENDICES

1. Brand Logo
2. Product Offer
3. Communication Channels
4. Pre-Recruiting Questionnaire
5. National Average of Brides age in their First Marriage
6. Interview Guide
7. Suggestion for Cata Vassalo Exclusive Collection Logo
8. Gantt Chart for Scenario 3

1- BRAND LOGO

Source: Brands Website

2- PRODUCT OFFER

Headdresses for Brides



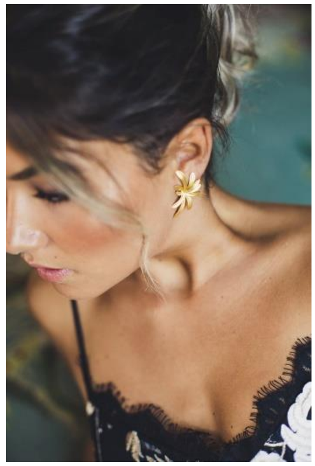

Headdresses for Guests



Headbands and Clutches for Guests

Kids

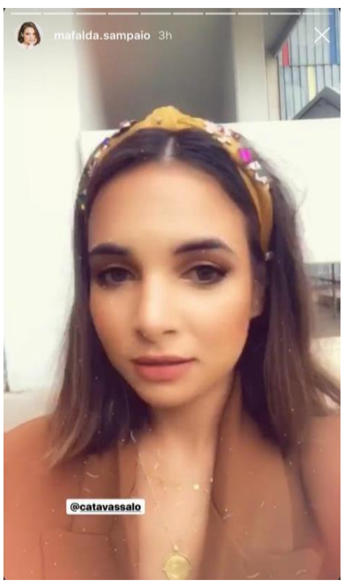
Earings

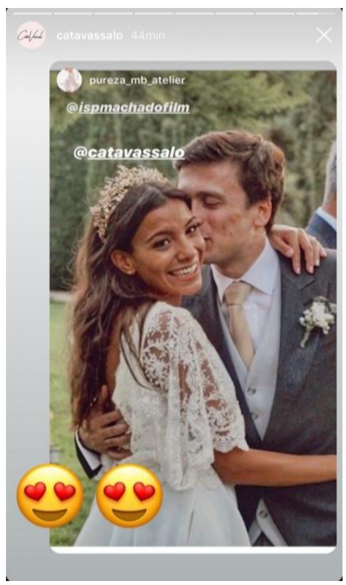


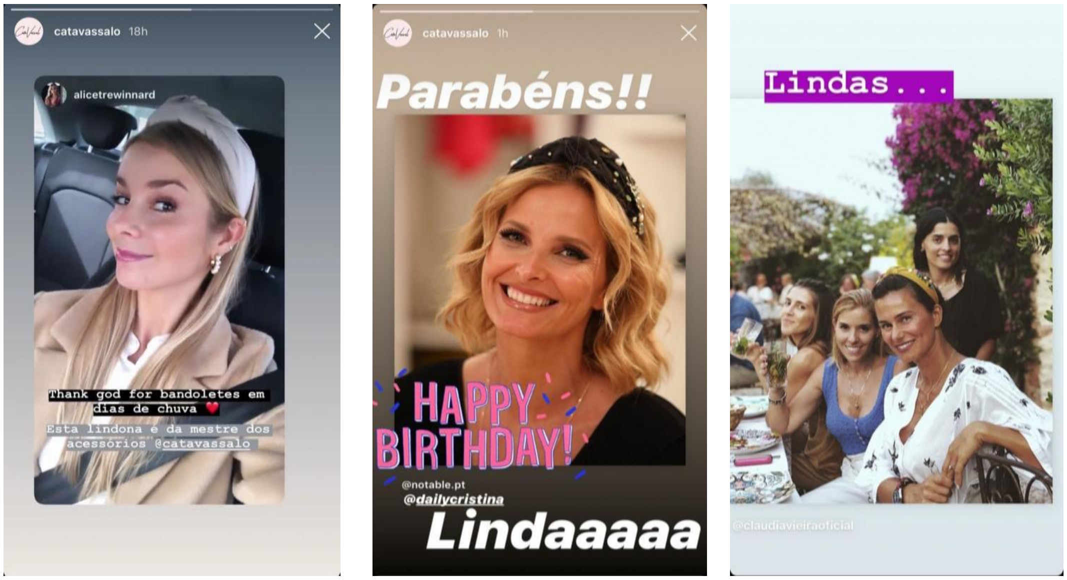
Source: Brands Website

3- COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Instagram

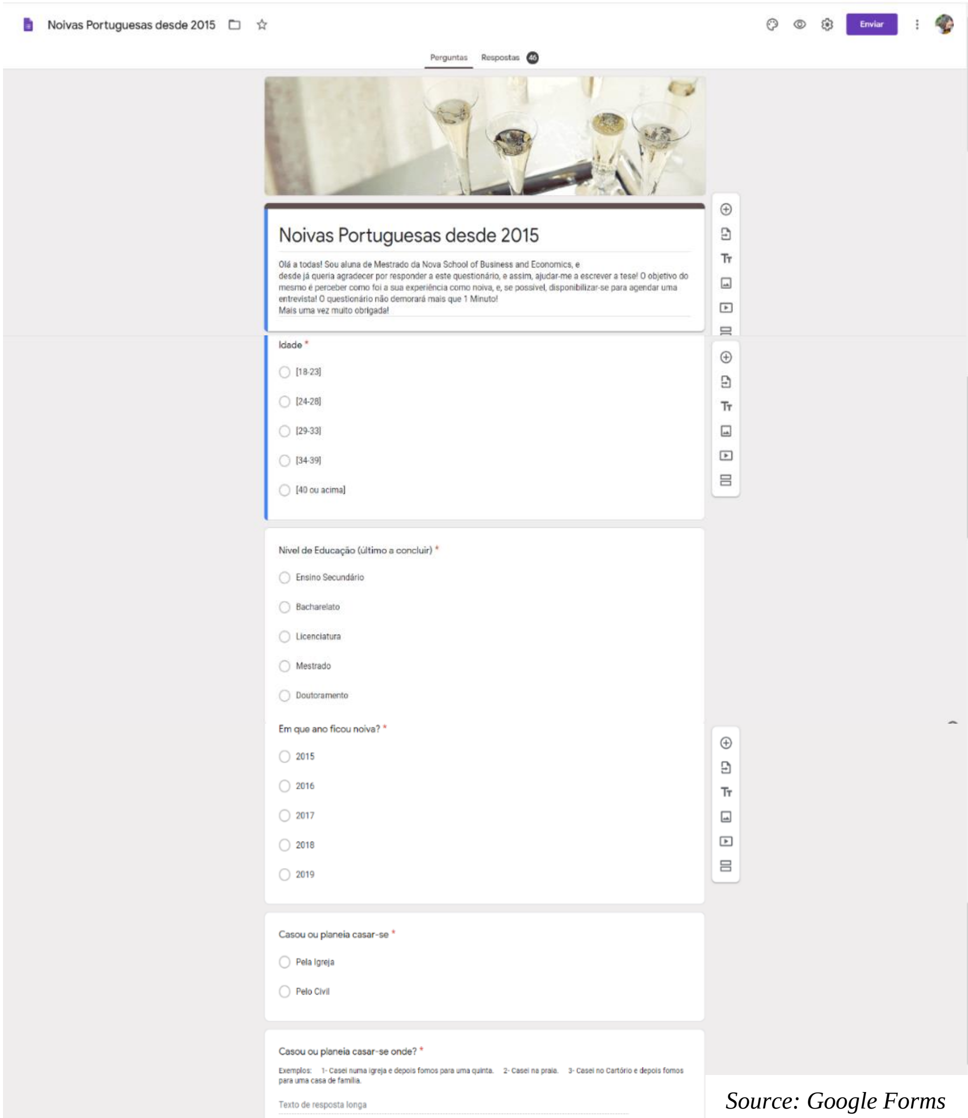






Source: Brands Instagram

4- PRE-RECRUITING QUESTIONNAIRE



Source: Google Forms

5- NATIONAL AVERAGE OF BRIDES AGE IN THEIR FIRST MARRIAGE

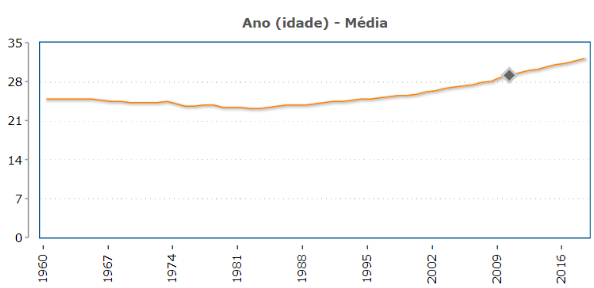


Figure 2 – *Source: Pordata, 2018*

6- INTERVIEW GUIDE

Warm-up

"Thank you for your time and availability to be interviewed. The purpose of the interview is understanding how the process of a bride is when choosing accessories and wedding dresses.

For this research, we are using a particular technique: the non-directive method; it means that I will not ask you specific questions about the subject, as in a standard questionnaire.

After the first question that I will introduce now, you will be free to tell me whatever comes to your mind on the subject.

If you don't mind, I will record the interview. This interview will last approximately 1 hour."

Initial Question

What accessories did you use on your wedding and how was the process to get them?

Topics to be Developed

- Opinion on Cata Vassalo – Brand Image
- Headdresses and Earrings- Drivers for decision
- Values Heritage and/or Possibility to Reutilize
- Was the type of dress Vs The dress store relevant for my decision?
- How did I get to those brands?
- Did previous dreams about my wedding influence my decision?

Additional techniques

Projective techniques:

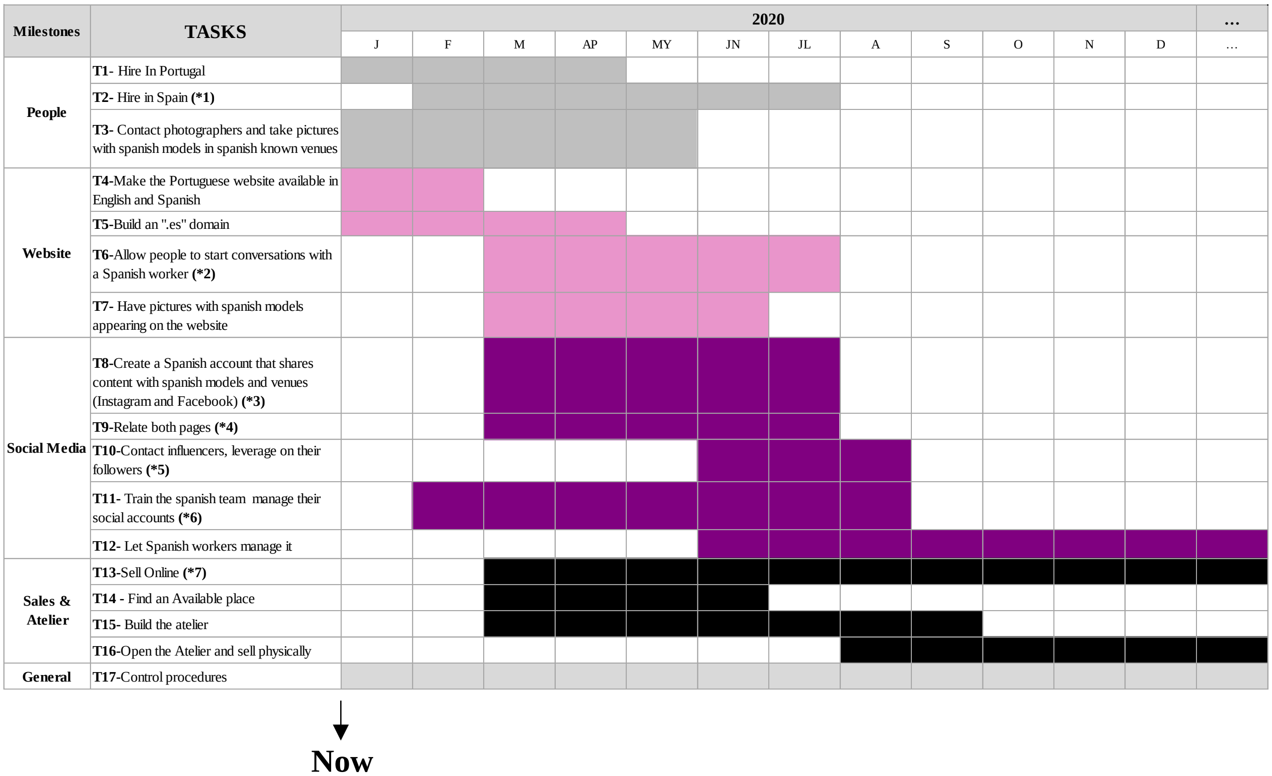
- Association technique: If you have to describe yourself, what you were feeling, emotionally, spiritually, about your look, all emotions together, on your wedding day, and relate it to an animal, what would it be?

Respondents' Profile:

- Year of Engagement, Age, level of education, Marriage Type, Marriage Location

7- SUGESTION FOR THE CATA VASSALO EXCLUSIVA COLLECTION LOGO

8- GANTT CHART FOR SCENARIO 3



Notes:

0- This model was constructed under the assumption there is financial availability and production capacity in the beginning of the timeline symbolized by "**now".**

***1-** Start just before the physical store is available (T14)

***2-** After hiring in Spain (T2)

***3-** Contrary to the website, social media accounts should start activity when pictures are ready.

***4-** Associating the portuguese and spanish accounts through the tagging function and inviting followers of the portuguese account to follow the spanish one

***5-** They are fundamental to increase awareness, nevertheless, they will only make deals with brands that have already shown content

***6-** In order for Cata Vassalo Portugal not to be overloaded with work, spanish workers should learn what are the necessary steps to pursue a successful social media presence.

***7-** Online sales is the starting point. Initially this option would be available in the portuguese website translated to spanish, and afterwards from the ".es" domain as soon as it is ready. The *Atelier* in Portugal should export until the *Atelier* in Spain is ready.